

National Park Service
2011 Environmental Achievement Awards

Winner

Yellowstone National Park

Excellence in Waste Management through Composting and Recycling

Yellowstone National Park (YELL) has long been active in regional and community sustainability initiatives, forming strong, dynamic relationships with its sister land management agencies, surrounding municipalities, and area universities. Over the past ten years, park leadership has worked closely with community leaders to bring about new approaches to solid waste management, with benefits extending well beyond the park's boundaries.

In 2010, the park continues to build on these relationships. The park's composting facility, operational since 2003, handles significant volumes of waste that used to be land filled. The compost is made available to community members and organizations within the region and is used in land reclamation and restoration projects.

In addition, the park's unique propane cylinder recycling program is now directly utilized by multiple federal and state agencies, local municipalities, numerous NPS entities, and provincial parks in Canada.

In 2010, the park instituted a new system to recycle bear spray canisters which will soon be offered to outside entities as well.

Overall, YELL's actions as a good neighbor have achieved the following results:

- Recycled 35,000 propane cylinders and 1,000 bear spray cans in 2010; approximately 25% of the cylinders came from outside the park; 95,500 cylinders recycled since inception;
- Provided the park's propane recycling service to other national parks, several National Forests, a national wildlife refuge, and several area municipalities;
- Achieved a solid waste diversion rate in 2009 of 80% (1,395 tons of solid waste diverted to compost). Solid waste and recycling totals in 2009 decreased by 1%, even though there were 250,000 more visitors than in 2008;
- Reused hundreds of tons of what was formerly solid waste and sewage sludge from the park as a soil amendment in 2010;
- Reduced the number of round trips from West Yellowstone to the landfill site resulting in 29,800 fewer miles driven annually and green house gas reductions of 99 tons, and improved road safety, reduced road wear, operational cost savings and lowered health-damaging diesel emissions; and
- Strengthened relationships with community partners and offered municipal debt relief.

YELL is committed to achieving more sustainable communities and their efforts should be an inspiration to other parks with ties to surrounding communities.